

XIX. *Extract of a Letter from Edward Hafted, Efq; F. R. S. and F. S. A. to Dr. Ducarel, concerning Chefnut Trees.*

Dear Sir,

Read March 8, 1771. **I**N answer to Mr. B's 1st rule—I must remark, instances are exceeding frequent of woods and coppices breaking off, by a sudden change, to other trees, and that where the situation and strata are entirely the same; sometimes without any mark of division, and sometimes with a ditch only, an old stub for a boundary, or perhaps distinguished only by the difference in the growth of the underwood, or the like. It is a known fact, that particular sorts of trees have grown in large tracts and masses in a country, which have been in succeeding times almost extirpated from thence, either from others being more diligently encouraged and preserved, or from the present destructive method of too frequent cutting them down; and only scattered stubs or trees have remained of the sort, thinly dispersed in woods and hedges. The wick, elm, maple, and others, are indigenous trees; and yet seldom, if ever, grow in large masses, or cover considerable tracts of ground; the reason of which

which is, they never shoot from the stool so as to make any considerable progress.

As to the 2d—A tree, or particular wood, may grow very kindly in a coppice, and yet in process of time, by the continual felling of the wood, may be entirely worn out, when other sorts, which bear the woodman's cutting-bill more kindly, will increase, and overrun the former, so as to fill every vacancy made by it. Besides, there are some kinds of wood which are poisoned, and in time decay by the near affinity of others. The ash is a particular instance of this poisonous quality towards other trees.

As to the 3d rule of seeds ripening kindly; I must disagree in this too, as I find very few, if any, whether indigenous or not, whose seeds do not ripen here sufficient to continue the tree easily; and where it is not in profusion, the indigenous tree will be found as deficient as some others, which are known to be otherwise.

Mr. B's last rule, of places taking their name from indigenous trees which grow there, may serve as well to prove all trees whatsoever so: there being but few trees which have grown in Britain, but our very ingenious etymologists have derived the names of some places from them.—Singular instances, I own, I do not recollect.

All kinds of things in general adopt the name of that country where they grow, or are made in the greatest perfection.—Instances of this are obvious in every necessary of life. The chesnut, whose fruit ripens in Spain in much more perfection than in this variable and colder climate, has gained the additional name of Spanish to it, among the merchants.

and venders of them, though in the country villages the woodmen will yet talk of the growth of this right ENGLISH CHESNUT. And as to Pliny's telling us that chesnuts were brought from Sardis to Italy long before his time; that does not make it less probable that they might have been the growth of Britain, at the very time they were brought from thence to Rome.

The ancient Norman buildings are mostly of this wood, which in all probability was fetched from this country; most of the stone wherewith our monasteries and buildings of such sort were erected came from Normandy. This seems to have been a mutual traffick for some centuries between the two countries.

How the notion arose first, that the forest mentioned by Fitz-Stevens to the Northward of London, was mostly of chesnut, I do not know, nor could I ever find any authority for it; though it continues the assertion of most literary men. If I might conjecture, I should think it to have arisen from a blunder and mistake of the name of Norwood; there being many decayed stubbs of chesnuts in the archbishop of Canterbury's Norwood, not far from London; which is, no doubt, the place Mr. Miller means, when he mentions such having been seen in the neighbourhood of the metropolis.

Most antiquarians assert that Old London was built of chesnut: that this tree grew near London, has been proved above from Norwood, and may from the name of Cheshunt, in Hertfordshire; that it may have done so in former times in great plenty, might be supposed from what I have said before; but one

reason of its decay may be assigned to the great increase of the metropolis, which consumed most of the chefnut timber near it; and the stubbs of such being much subject to decay, few, if any of them, could naturally last to this time, so as to bring any profit to the owner, but have been grubbed up from time to time, till they are now almost totally eradicated; and I think, there is great probability that the universal decay and destruction of this kind of timber, throughout the realm, appeared in so serious a light to the legislature, as to give the first rise for our laws for the preservation of timber in general.

Oak timber is so entirely different from chefnut, in the rings and spaces, which appear when cut transversely, that it is impossible to mistake the one from the other.

In a note, p. 96. of the Anglo-Norman antiquities, mention is made, of a large tract of chefnut woods, near Sittingbourne, in Kent (and in the North West part of East Kent, as it should be printed), which is certainly right; these woods are a very large tract, which more or less have chefnut stubbs spread over the whole space of them. They extend some miles, from the environs of the town of Milton, by the old highway (now disused), leading from thence to Maidstone. The general name of the whole tract, is Chefnut or Chestney Woods. The 40 acres mentioned in the said note to have been grubbed up, were only felled; and were of such a size and growth, as to be mostly used as timber. On the top of Chefnut Hill between Newington and Sittingbourne, there stood a chefnut tree of prodigious size, which has been felled within these few

years, the stool of which may now be seen close to the high road.

The production of nature in this vast tract of woods is so plain, that it would be absurd to use arguments to defend it; nor shall I bring examples of it from other countries, which might be had: I shall only take notice, with Dr. Ducarel, that in the ancient forests of Kent, which lay to the south of it, adjoining to Suffex and Surry, there remain large old chesnut stubs or brocks, now almost worn out, and perished, which are left by the woodmen as termini or boundaries, either of parishes or of private property; which is the universal custom every where made use of to distinguish the wood of different owners, and are never cut down or altered; so that they must have stood sacred to this use, from the first introduction of private property into this island; and were no doubt even then of considerable age, by their being made choice of for this use, in preference to any others.

But to return to the neighbourhood of Milton.—The manor of Norwood, within that parish, is called, in the highest records we are acquainted with, Norwood-Chestney, Chastney, and Castney, no doubt from the great plenty of chesnut within its bounds, even in those early times. Nor is this a singular instance of any place in England being named from the chesnut tree; Cheshunt, in Suffolk; and Cheshunt, in Hertfordshire, having both their names from the plenty of chesnuds near them: the last of these places, Chancy tells us, seems in old time to have abounded with them; and that most of the ancient houses in that vill were built of them; and in the venerable

nerable book of Doomſday, we have an account of a quantity of woodland in this pariſh, ſufficient for the feeding of 1200 hogs, which ſhews us that this conſiderable tract of wood was of ſuch fort, as to afford plenty of good food for ſwine; as it certainly muſt be to afford pannage for ſo large a number; and that theſe woods were cheſnuts, may in all probability be preſumed from the above circumſtances.

The ſame venerable record likewiſe mentions the village of Box, alias Boxbury, in Hertfordſhire; which, the learned Serjeant tells us, was ſo called from a large wood, which retains the name to this day; and I have now before me the names of more than a dozen pariſhes and places, which have taken their names from the box tree, and retain it to this time. The fir, no doubt, from every evidence that can be had of former times, and by the evidence of our own eyes, from the numbers of them which have been dug up in almoſt every part of Britain, was an indigenous tree of this county; notwithstanding Cæſar's aſſertion to the contrary, who appears to have been but little acquainted with it, when he tells us, "this iſland had every kind of "tree the ſame as Gaul, except the fir and the "beech;" both of which were in the greateſt plenty here at that very time; the latter was particularly ſo within the county of Kent, the only ſpot he might be ſaid to be acquainted with: and yet, after this, no one ſure will aſſert that either of theſe trees are not indigenous; though the former of them is entirely extirpated (as the production of nature) from the Southern part of Britain, which the cheſnut is not; though it is made uſe of as an argument againſt  
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its being the natural product of this country. The elm bears every mark of its being indigenous ; and, according to one of Mr. B's general rules, it must be so, for there are near 40 places in England, which take their name from this tree, most of which are mentioned in the book of Doomsday.

Whoever has been much acquainted with the woods and tracts of ground lying on our Chalky Hills, will surely never contend that the yew is not the indigenous growth of this country. I am,

Dear SIR,

Yours, &c.

Huntingfield, in Kent,  
Nov. 29, 1770.

Edw. Hafted.